[Dust on his Clothes]

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DUST ON HIS CLOTHES Men Against Granite

The widow sat by the window watching the spring sunshine on the granite-paved street. Across the river light fell on the shed roofs where her husband, Edo, had worked. Down the street men were entering or leaving the beer garden where Edo used to stop on the way home.

“We came over together when we were young — only eighteen,” she said, “We were married in our hometown, Brescia, in Lombardy. We went by train through Milan and Paris. At Havre we took the French boat, the Transatlantique. Edo's uncle had crossed on it the year before. We traveled steerage to save money. The food wasn't the best, but it was well-cooked and clean. It satisfied us. And the beds were clean. Nothing like that hotel in New York where we spent our first night. The beds were full of bugs. When Edo gave up his work he used to sit in bed or on the porch reading his Italian paper. Il Progresso, a New York paper. I still get it. He read that the hotel where we stayed was being torn down. It's a good thing.

Edo had cousins here already, working in their uncle's place. Everyone was working in granite then. Our own people. So It wasn't so much like coming to a foreign land. Edo never cut stone until we came to this country. He learned it in Barre. We had happy times.

“No, I wasn't afraid then. Edo wasn't afraid either. If he was he never showed it. None of the men do — unless sometime when they're drinking, and then only joking about 2 it. But the women know. We see it coming — the change. It begins to show in a man's face — in

his eyes. Sometimes the smell of granite dust on Edo's clothes would make me want to cry — but not when he could see me. Edo was a gay laughing man, tall and strong. He could sing too, he had a fine voice. And he was handsome, a blond.

We never missed one of the Italian picnics at Dewey Park — halfway between Montpelier and Barre. There was a trolley line then, and the Italians from Montpelier would come with their families, too. Edo was always gay. Sometimes the crowd would suddenly stop singing to hear Edo. And It was as if he was so busy making happy music that he didn't realize he was singing alone. Today the picnics are fewer, and further away from home. Everyone goes in his own car.

“He was only thirty-two when he died. So very young, and the gray was already in his hair. But his life had been a full one, a hard one. Everything he did was that way. All of himself he put into it, whether it was working or having a good time, he was that kind of a man. I don't mind talking about him. I think he should be in a book. If I could write I'd put him in a book myself. A whole book about him.

“The world is crazy today. Edo was wild too, in a way — a different may than people are now. A more healthy normal way. I don't know what's wrong with people today. I'm glad we didn't have children. I wouldn't want a girl or boy of mine growing up the way it is today. 3 “I don't care about going back to Italy. I think it's worse over there. I would have gone back. We used to talk about it lots. How we would go back together and tell the old friends about Barre — our new home and new friends. It would have been good to go back with Edo — but not alone.

“What do I do now? I don't do much. I have friends. . a few good friends. They are widows too, some of them. We talk, play cards, sometimes we go out to eat or see a movie, or just to walk when it's nice weather. The ones with children—perhaps they sell a little liquor — but only to people they know, decent people. And they're decent themselves — not like the girls today, always out with a different man every night.

“That sounds bitter again? Not really, it isn't. I've had a long time now to watch people and things — to see the change. You're too busy with your own life when you're young to notice others. Everything is yours around you, and your people, the ones you love. Later, your blood slows down and you have time to sit and watch. Sometimes you don't like much what you see. Maybe it's just the difference in age. The people were the same before, only you didn't notice.

“But I have talked too much of my own thoughts and not enough about Edo. The story about granite would be his story, not mine. But I know his first job was with the Giordi Brothers. Only eight men worked with him. The shed was originally the barn of the Giordi house. Many successful sheds started like that, in a small way. The owners worked, too. They were skilled workers who wanted to be their own 4 bosses. Most of them did well. They needed little capital to start. The important thing, Edo used to say, was the hard work, the skilled work they put into the monuments, and the patience. And as the money came in, they replaced hand tools with the machinery the big sheds were beginning to put in. I never went near the sheds. Only once I saw the quarries. All the granite I saw was dust on his clothes and blocks on flat cars across the river . . . that was enough.

“It gave us a good living. We always had that. Edo left me money. I don't know how long it will last. . . if it doesn't last I can go to work. I'm still young enough. I can cook or even wait on tables. I wouldn't like it, but I'd do it. I'd feel better probably if I had something to do and less time to think. . . . I like to think and read. I like to just sit here by the window and watch people and cars. I don't feel all by myself . . . not ever. Some way it seems he is always with me. . . I guess we had something most folks miss.”

Down the street a car was slowing up in front of the beer garden. Four stonecutters stepped out, slapping stone dust from their clothes. The widow said:

“His last summer, Edo used to sit on the side porch, in the sun, and watch his friends stop in there for wine or beer after work. They'd call out to him. And sometimes, afterwards,

they'd come over full of the news and politics they had talked about over their drinks. If there weren't too many of them I'd make wine or brandy eggnogs—it was the only way Edo would take raw eggs. They never spoke of 5 sickness. I remember the last afternoon he sat in the sun. It was late May. He was looking at the early onion tops that were showing in neighbor Tosi's vegetable garden, and he said, 'Remember, Elsa, it was May when we left Brescia. May fifteenth. And over there the potato sprouts were already pushing through the earth. Here the green comes later...'"

The widow took a framed photograph from the wall.

“Here is his picture. You can see how fine a man he was. I don't mean to boast about him. I never had to do that. There he is with that smile on his face. . . that's Edo. I would have to cry now at the end, I'm sorry. 'It's just looking at his face with that smile. Looking and thinking back.”